

Name: _____

INTRODUCTION: When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers

Answer each question below in complete sentences.

Before you begin reading, number each paragraph in the margins (hint: there are 16 paragraphs).

- 1) "When elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers." Where does this saying come from? What does it mean? (this response should be at least two sentences)

- 2) Underline the 5 countries mentioned in paragraph 3.

- 3) Paragraph 3 mentions the phrase "eyewitness account." Define this.

Eyewitness account	Definition:
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How might this account influence and/or impact the stories?

- 4) Why are children always involved in wars? Explain at least two reasons why.

- 5) Define collateral damage. Look at paragraph 7 and give two examples of collateral damage:

Collateral damage	Definition:	Examples:
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- 6) Why are children so often targeted during war?

7) **Highlight** the examples given of genocides that have occurred. Define genocide.

GENOCIDE	Definition:
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8) Define the following terms:

ETHNIC	
RACIAL	
RELIGIOUS	

9) The word “dehumanize” is used in paragraph 14. Based on the CONTEXT, what do you think it means?

10) This introduction ends with a quote from Gandhi. What does quote this mean to you?

INTRODUCTION

*When elephants fight,
it is the grass that suffers.*

his saying is an ancient proverb of the Kikuyu people, a tribal group in Kenya, Africa. While the source of this quote is lost in the distant past, the wisdom is as true today as when those words were first spoken, perhaps thousands of years ago. Its essence is simplicity. When the large—the strong, the dominant—fight, it is the small—the weak, the least powerful—who suffer most. Regardless of which elephant wins, or loses, the grass beneath their feet will always be trampled and destroyed.

Joseph Stalin, former Soviet leader, stated, “The death of a million is a statistic, the death of one, a tragedy.” We will start with the one.

When Elephants Fight tells the story of five children, one from each of five very distinct conflicts around the world—Afghanistan, Bosnia, the Sudan, Sri Lanka and Uganda. We hope that these five stories will demonstrate the devastating impact

that war can have on young innocent bystanders. Through these very personal accounts we hope you will not only feel the pain these children have suffered, but also both sympathize and empathize with them. After all, but for the accident of birth, this could be you. Along with each eyewitness account, we have tried to briefly present something of the history and geopolitical background of the conflicts in each country.

There has never been a war fought that was started by children—or one that failed to harm them. Children are the grass beneath the feet of the men, the tribes, the armies and the nations engaged in armed conflict. Regardless of the winner—and there is a strong case to be made that war produces no winners, only greater and lesser losers—the children always suffer.

Although it might be argued that in some wars efforts are made to spare children, this is, in fact, an

impossible task. Children must always suffer the consequences of armed struggle. The fact of the matter is that we live in a world with limited resources and these resources cannot be used for both the purposes of war and the provisions of peace. Every act of war steals resources that could be used to build schools and hospitals, plant fields and feed the hungry.

In every war there is always collateral damage. This is the politically correct term that describes a situation in which an intended target is missed and something—or someone—else bears the brunt of an attack. A military position is targeted, but the school or church or mosque next to it is destroyed by artillery fire, bombs or missiles. A bullet is aimed at a soldier but hits a woman or child hiding in the ditch behind him. Military experts assert that no war is possible without collateral damage—it is inevitable, and by being inevitable, somehow it becomes acceptable. Strangely, this term involves both property and people, as if one is no more important than the other.

Collateral damage can involve the destruction of a hospital, a school, an orchard or a crop. The damages done to these properties might ultimately cause the death of more people than the battle itself. A school is destroyed, and future doctors and

engineers and teachers are never trained. A hospital is destroyed, and the sick die and diseases spread. A field, crop or well is destroyed, and malnutrition, deprivation and starvation take lives. In almost every war ever fought, there were more lives lost because of the effects of the war than those lost on the battlefield. Starvation and disease ultimately kill and maim more people than those claimed by direct conflict.

In some conflicts children are not collateral damage, not a sad secondary effect of war, but the specific targets of war. They are seen as equally valid targets of death as any armed combatant. Perhaps, by some sick and twisted logic, they are even seen as better targets than an armed combatant. They can't fight back.

In the greatest of human atrocities, armed combatants actively seek out any member of a group in an attempt to eradicate, eliminate and annihilate that group. We are, of course, talking about genocide. Genocide by definition is the deliberate and systematic destruction of a group based on race, religion or culture.

The genocide most known to the modern Western world is the Holocaust that took place in Europe from 1939–1945, when Nazi Germany attempted to eliminate all Jewish people and certain other ethnic minorities. This atrocity resulted in millions

of men, women and children being systematically identified, captured, transported and slaughtered.

It would be tempting to view the Holocaust as just a temporary insanity that involved one group of people. This is not the case. Within the last one hundred years alone, genocide has taken place in Armenia, Cambodia, Rwanda, Yugoslavia, Russia, the Sudan and China. It would be an understatement to say that over one hundred million people were killed in these periods of genocidal insanity. And each of those victims, regardless of the specific conflict, was equally human and equally important, and the loss of life equally tragic.

There are times when children are not even targeted because of any ethnic, racial or religious reason, but simply because they are children. They are the most vulnerable as well as the most impressionable targets. They are removed by armed men from the safety of their homes and the care of their families so that they can be used as servants, slaves or sexual partners, or they are forced to become combatants in the conflict.

The legacy of child soldiers is one of the greatest tragedies of this past century. Young children are taken from their families by armed combatants. Family members are slaughtered—sometimes children are forced to take the lives of members of

their own families. Young children, some younger than ten years old, become indoctrinated and trained in the ways of killing. They become efficient killers for the same reason that children can become such agents for good—they are impressionable, open and too young to understand the ultimate consequences of their actions.

One of the first steps in training for armed combat is to dehumanize, minimize and distance those being targeted from those who will do the killing. This may seem a somewhat unlikely proposition from our vantage point in the Western world. Nevertheless, we know it happens. Although we might be geographically and politically distanced from the war zones of today's world, we must never assume that we are somehow superior to people who find themselves in the midst of these conflicts.

Some readers will almost certainly claim that *When Elephants Fight* presents a biased view of the stories presented. Despite our best efforts to present the full picture, this is an inevitable reality. These criticisms will be founded not so much on the validity of our efforts as on the personal passions that these conflicts arouse. And, equally certain, since we view our world through the eyes of our own personal history, some of this criticism will be valid. We acknowledge that we enter this project with

a clear and stated bias. This bias is best put into words by former United States president and humanitarian, Jimmy Carter: "War may sometimes be a necessary evil. But no matter how necessary, it is always an evil, never a good. We will not learn how to live together in peace by killing each other's children."

Children around the world suffer from the consequences of war. We live in a time and place where our children have escaped not only the direct consequences of these wars but even the knowledge of these conflicts.

For the future to be better than the past, better than the present, we must help equip our children with the awareness and understanding of the world around them and their ability to bring about change. Gandhi stated, "If you are going to change the world, start with the children."

With the purchase of this book you have helped children who have suffered from war—royalties from this book are being donated to GuluWalk to help children affected by the war in Uganda. For more information visit www.guluwalk.com.

